

# Combat Center Helps Students 'shoot' for Teamwork

**MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER TWENTYNINE PALMS, CALIF.**

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Students and teachers from the Morongo Unified School District and Copper Mountain College visited the Combat Center May 29 as part of the local Career Pathways event to help students select a career goal and to encourage students to use the educational systems.

More than a dozen of those students and teachers visited the Marine Corps Staff Non-commissioned Officer Academy's Sergeants Course aboard the Combat Center for a class on teamwork and leadership while learning about different types of military weapons.

While at Sergeants Course, seventh and eighth graders, and teachers from CMC, were educated about the different weapons systems ranging from an M16-A2 service rifle to the M2 .50 caliber machine gun. After memorizing the four safety rules regarding weapons, the students learned about the teamwork it takes to maintain and fire most of the weapons on display.

Gunnery Sgt. Peter O'Brien, a Sergeants Course instructor and faculty advisor, explained with each weapon system, the entire team must be knowledgeable about the other Marines' jobs.

"If the [machine] gunner gets shot, that [assistant machine] gunner has to be able to jump on that weapon and start laying accurate fire," O'Brien said to the class. "And the third team member now has two jobs. He has to make sure the weapon has ammunition, and he's has to take the [assistant machine] gunner's job as well."

After they had the opportunity to ask questions, O'Brien showed the students how to hold the weapons safely, and then invited them onto the stage for a hands-on experience.

"The entire class was great," said Annette Bell, the director of the transfer and empowerment program. "The instructor tied-in exactly what we were trying to show about teamwork. These students were able to see with their own eyes how important it is to be able to trust the person in front and behind you."

The students took what they learned from O'Brien and began working together to simulate firing the weapons.

"I learned that it is a lot easier to work as a team than alone," said Jade Cervantes, a 12-year-old student on the tour. "The teacher focused a lot on how it is important to learn the job of those around you or else the entire group can fall apart. It is extremely scary in his position because if someone can't step up, they can all get shot."

After leaving Sergeants Course, the students were taken to Felix Field for the last part of their tour, where the Provost Marshal's Office prepared a mock scenario to show the students what it takes to be a military police canine handler.

Although their time with PMO was mainly to show the students a good time, they had the opportunity to see teamwork and communication skills between the dogs and their handlers.

Cpl. Samuel Corns, the assistant kennel master, told the students for the scenario, the dog had been called to a domestic dispute, and put the call on the speakerphone for all the students to hear.

The radio crackled as the responding officer reported they were in pursuit of a vehicle, speeding down Del Valle Road, heading toward Felix Field.

After students were seated they heard sirens and a patrol car rounded the field chasing the reported vehicle. As both vehicles came to a stop, the 'suspect' jumped out of his car and took off down the field. The students then watched as he was taken down by one of the military working dogs.

After the demonstration, the students asked questions about what it was like to have a dog while deployed, and requested to see other ways the dogs were trained to bring a suspect down.

As the tour came to an end and the students began their journey home, the teachers knew that their time aboard the Combat Center will hold a life-long impact on their students and will lead them toward a good future.

"This goes above and beyond what we were trying to show them about teamwork," Bell said. "This is an experience they will take with them for the rest of their lives. It was absolutely amazing."

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